

Planning the Plan June 16, 2005, Community Forum

Transcription of Blue Note Cards Submitted by Participants

Note: As each participant signed in for the forum, he/she was given a blue note card on which were written the following 2 questions. Participants were urged to write down their answers, and filled-out cards were collected as participants left at the end of the evening. [Total received: 75]

At the end of the forum, participants were also offered cards of other colors on which to note down any comment, feedback, and guidance they would like to provide. These responses are listed after the two “blue card” questions. [Total received: 15]

This transcription does not edit any responses. For the sake of spotting common threads, however, responses are grouped according to general categories. Responses that cover a number of topics are grouped according to the first topic mentioned.

What would you like to ask other townspeople that would help- us plan for the future?

Community interactions, decision-making

Consider the needs of the town as a whole rather than their self-interests & those of their immediate neighbors

Approach the process in a spirit of curiosity and good will

Be aware of our dwindling resources, and how it will change our needs [no car transportation, only local food, etc.] Do you remember the planning with Walt in '96? Why didn't we hear about its results?

How can we get you involved/interested in planning Amherst's future

How to break down the barriers/cliques that exist in Amherst. Why don't town committees actually represent the people and why don't they actually listen at hearings

Please see [put] yourself in the big picture as a member of us all.

Given the significant percentage of Amherst land already developed and given the democratic form of town governance – Town Meeting – is a Comprehensive Plan necessary?

How can we foster more cooperation in using the many talents of Amherst

What are you willing to sacrifice in order to achieve a better Amherst?

How do we achieve more fairly realized diversity in town government and decision making

Why has it been difficult for individuals and groups, with differing ideas, to compromise with and respect each other?

Stick together

Are you active in town activities? Which?

Are you willing to sacrifice or at least negotiate neighborhood interests to the overall interest of the town as a whole?

How can we make this town a model of civility, diversity and harmony? How can we make this town affordable [tax-wise]?

How would you like to contribute to the welfare or needs of your neighbors and/or fellow townspeople? [e.g. skills/expertise, services, support to people in need, mentoring, fellowship]

What are the consequences of not planning? What are the obstacles to reducing auto use?

What would allow more people from different backgrounds to participate in town affairs

What helps you feel that you are part of this town? Do you feel safe in this town? [A “diversity” question -- a lot of blacks and latino residents don’t feel safe.] What do you do to be part of this town?

How do we work together for a harmonious approach to solving problems?

How can we create an inclusive community that sets an example for other communities?

What are you willing to do? [to make our dream goals real]

How will future government be run – i.e. charter vs. town meeting & new town manager? Do you come to downtown Amherst? What would make you come here more often?

How much volunteer time can you devote to your community’s improvements weekly?

That they read the town’s zoning map and say which areas to and do not need the Master Planning focus.

How can we create “software” embodied in a “master plan” which is flexible, responsive and comprehensive enough to cope any better than our present system can? [or: what question has the answer “42” – with apology to D. Adams!]

What like about Amherst, approach to change

What do you value most about Amherst? What would you change in Amherst, if you could? What state, national and international changes will Amherst need to adjust to? What are you willing to do to make Amherst a better place?

1. What kind of town do you see Amherst as being; how would you characterize it? 2. What do you find here that makes you want to live here? 3. How can we keep it and enhance it?

What made them decide to live in Amherst? What do you value most about living here? Have your children attended Amherst schools? Which is most important to your well being, preservation of natural places or business development? In what ways do you personally become involved in – or contribute to – the life of our town? How can we make sure our government is responsive to the needs and wishes of the people? How can we make sure the Master Plan stays a guiding communication tool and not become a “club” that is wielded by the Planning Board?

Realize that change, growth will occur – but how? What should town center be?

What don’t you like about Amherst? What would you change?

What don’t you like about Amherst? What upsets you about Amherst?

How large a population is too much, and where should it be situated [focused]? What basic services are still needed, and where should they be located [fire, police, schools, range of recreation opportunities]? What growth could occur if each new segment of sewer line goes in?

What is your vision of the downtown and how can work to accommodate your vision with others in town?

What is really important in town that you couldn’t live without? Where do you spend time in town? If you plan on staying in Amherst, why -- what keeps you?

How many people would live in an ideal Amherst?

Do you believe growth [building, increased traffic, budgets, etc] can continue indefinitely? If not, how will we know that we have grown enough? How will we set limits without becoming exclusive or losing our vibrancy? Can we live within our ecological means?

What kinds of change make you fear for Amherst?

Affordability

Just to ask what are their needs and concerns. Are they able to stay, financially, in Amherst

What is most important to help Amherst move towards realistically being an efficient, economic, streamlined, etc. town that is living in the 21st century? What do you feel is the major problem [besides economics] for you to live a reasonably decent quality of life in Amherst?

How easily can you now pay the real estate taxes and municipal charges that Amherst exacts, and how easily do you expect to do so over the next 20 years?

Transportation & circulation

How do you feel about mass transit, walking, bicycles

Did you drive to this meeting? Do you consider [sketch of bike] transportation?

What do we want to do about traffic and pedestrians?

Town services & finances

What do you think is most important for sustaining a quality school system?

What do you need from the town to make your life sustainable?

How can we have a town that is diverse with high quality services, affordable housing, and high environmental standards and keep our tax base fair and sufficient to provide good services for all groups?

How would you like the town to be funded? Where should the town get the money it needs to function

Which town functions are essential; which are valuable; which are nice to have if we have ample money?

Are you willing to pay higher taxes to preserve interests in conservation and land preservation? How important is it to you that governance meetings of this town reflect the diversity in our classrooms?

How will Amherst pay for its town services and schools and libraries – while protecting as much open land and farm land as possible?

Business

Not to be fearful of all profit-driven projects

How would you increase our tax base, attract business – yet keep our community environmentally attractive?

What businesses do you think would make it in Amherst and also be welcomed by the community?

Does your image of the future for Amherst include businesses and more commercial areas? Does your view about each choice take into account the whole town's interest and not just personal preference or neighborhood view? [and taking into account needs and wants of children]

How can we keep rents affordable to better support local businesses and keep them in Amherst –keep the “chain stores” out

If you had a small grocery & hardware store near your neighborhood, would you do at least 50% of your shopping there? Why do you think it is necessary to bring “industry” [besides the education industries] to Amherst? Do you find current zoning laws restrictive in any way?

How important is economic development to Amherst's future? Are we willing to pay higher taxes so as not to have to worry about economic development?

Housing

What will your housing needs be for the next 20 years? Could you imagine using your car less? What basic retail/business functions do you leave Amherst for?

Natural resources

How important is the well-being of Amherst's trees to you?

Where are the wetlands? 1. More busing for disabled people – what do you think? 2. Diversity issue.

3. Increase daily activities downtown for “almost senior” citizens – what do you think?

How concerned are you about adding agricultural land/open space to existing amount?

Cultural resources

How important are the arts, and how can we support them financially as they are a reason people come and stay! What arts organizations attracted you to the area? Where do you spend your free time? How do you value our historic resources and what are you willing to do to preserve those buildings, landscapes, and other resources? [We have a demolition delay bylaw, but it is not effective.]

Other

Poorly worded question! Don't know/understand what you are look for!

How to quiet the leaf blowers of landowners? Promote retail businesses? Promote offices? Promote town/gown especially Amherst College and Hampshire College relations with the town. Provide for their staff housing/health services.

What's the most important thing the Amherst Master Plan could accomplish?

Shared goals, values, priorities to guide decision-making

1. To build what needs to be built, while protecting what needs to be protected. 2. To be the medium for community-wide communication about what we want and how to achieve it. 3. Make the diversity less divisive. 4. Find common ground and provide practice in working together. 5. Start from land characteristics.

I'd like to see the Amh. Master Plan preserve and create opportunities for the voices of the townspeople to be heard throughout the planning process and to ensure that there are real checks on the power of any committee(s) during the implementation of the plan. What has made Amherst the wonderful place to live that it is is the continual dialogue at Town Meetings and elsewhere in town. I think it is essential that we resist development pressures and honor neighborhoods. Business development should only occur in Village Centers and downtown.

Identify the most important characteristics of Amherst, and develop a plan for preserving and reinforcing them in a sustainable fashion.

Clarify agreed upon values and principles that will be the shared basis of decisions about plans & policies

Spend as little money as possible to study only those areas of town where different uses intersect.

Improve public understanding of the complexities of municipal decision making.

Reasoned balance between preservation and growth. Build on consensus about ends and means

To guide where the town should put its resources; by setting priorities for spending tax dollars

Streamline the process. Develop a clear (?) vision for the future with concrete recommendations to achieve this vision. P.S. The plan needs to be re-visited often!

Give guidance to Planning Board, open space purchase, focus of housing areas. Could help sort priorities for Select Bd, Town Mtg. instead of item by item decisions. Figure out if current "standard" zones [land use] are still appropriate.

Develop a forward-thinking, proactive blueprint for preserving and enhancing Amherst values.

To convince decision makers [and everyone else] how important and useful overall planning is in making decisions rather than examining every issue separately and without context. I.e. the plan has to be convincing enough to really be accepted and influence choices.

Guidance, leadership, direction. An agreed vision for our "common" good – shared health.

The Master Plan should result in a reasoned and thoughtful plan for land use, housing, historic preservation, economic development, etc so we can make consistent decisions for our future development.

Best land use for future – at least of what land is left! Must do it soon – it will only get harder with time!

A consensus of how the town should look, so committees, town officials, and Town Meeting can use this as guide in decision making process.

Stop our “re-inventing the wheel” over every land-use issue.

Besides making best use of existing zoning, neighborhoods, open space, downtown modernization, etc., it should be able to prioritize where improvements, further development, reassigning use of zones, improve traffic flow, parking problem abatement need drastic upgrade.

That it would be a guide for decision making on housing, recreation, open space, land development and so on – with guideposts – patterned, perhaps, on our zoning model.

Help us prioritize the decisions we want made on at least an annual basis.

Planned development

To provide a good, clear road map for the next couple of decades – with input from all segments of the population.

Provide town Meeting and Town staff with guidance for revising the zoning bylaw and possibly the zoning map.

Give the people in Town Hall some strong guidance in helping to deal with present and future challenges.

Importance of community life, participation, interactions, social viability, inclusiveness

An alert to the structure of our community, interrelationships and mutual dependency.

Address the concerns and desires of a diverse group of people

Bring people of different backgrounds and ages together for mutual understanding/support/camaraderie/economic prosperity/community activism.

A deliberate, inclusive educational dialogue that accomplishes a community consensus on the delicate balance between sustainable economic development and open space.

Bring all the people together. [Have you used the former study of land use – raise da_?___]

Perhaps a sketch of an outline for what we really need to assemble interactively as citizens – keep the plan simple and flexible; the “empty set” is an important set! Less is more!!

To keep an open, flexible and non-binding structure; open too to vigorous and frequent public discussion, during and especially after the process of Plan composition.

Plan to protect multi-cultural diversity through affordable housing, businesses that appeal to many groups in town and good transportation.

What have you done lately for your town? [besides paying your taxes]

Balance of land uses

Achieve a balance of conservation and necessary economic development which in turn provides an accessible, inclusive, level playing field for all citizens regardless of race or class.

Create new and support existing excellence in areas of business, affordable housing, education.

Business friendliness need not contradict our ideal of environmentalism, multiculturalism, etc.

Plan to balance residential and business uses.

Natural resources, including open space

To create a structure for preparing/strengthening community living in light of running out of natural resources

*Lessen the town’s total ecological footprint (gradually and increasingly). Meeting this goal will “naturally” lead to numerous other benefits to the quality and diversity of life in Amherst

Protect open space. Plan for growth. Provide compact affordable housing. Diversify tax base. Connect to surrounding towns more effectively in terms of land-use, mass transit & transport planning. Meaningful economic development.

Relationship between Town and Colleges/University

Predicate the Master Plan on a materially changed Town/Gown relationship under which the university/colleges contribute more and differently to the town.

Help the farms and businesses survive/thrive by working with the colleges – because they depend on the town’s ambiance and service and recreation.

Provide for the anticipated student growth [10,000] at UMass and strive to retain the essential character of Amherst

Town Center & Village Centers

Develop the commercial life of the town, and focus initially on the Cinema & cafes [charm] that would give some sense of a European setting

A vital downtown with access to the arts and support for our cultural organizations. Healthy public transportation system

Reinforce village center priority and encourage in-fill housing & businesses

Concentrating growth in downtown, stopping sprawl.

“Sculpt” Amherst into “small communities” that would have small village centers within walking distance of the small community residents. Each village center might have a school, a branch library, a post office, a general store, and perhaps a restaurant. Goal: To reduce use of automobile.

Intensify the use of developed land [go up and around] and protect existing farms and open land – [and create a sustainable tax base for everyone in town]

Businesses, including tax base considerations

Encourage more economic development so that the tax base will be more diversified. This requires that the approval process may have to be revised so as not to discourage potential businesses that are well-suited to Amherst.

Find ways to broaden the tax base without impacting on life-quality. Many of socio-economic problems could be alleviated by above.

Orderly, restrained growth [restaurants & cerebral businesses?] that would help tax base but without Rte 9 sprawl and [most important] preserving the green areas of Amherst.

Incorporating more business into our town and making business people feel supported and welcome & yet keep Amherst as wonderful a town as it is. Don’t prevent flexible use of space, i.e. Pine Str.

Housing, affordability

Land use decisions that support ensuing economic diversity in our community

Affordable housing?

Balance housing availability for diversified economic population – the whole spectrum of income. Stop gentrification [building \$500,000+++ houses]

Affordable housing. 1. Purchase the Hope Church N. Amherst land 2. First time homebuyers’ homes.

A lot of renters could afford low costs home and contribute to Amherst’s tax base. 3. Keep families in Amherst

More affordable housing. Teen space. More accessible streets and buildings [fixing sidewalks].

Continue to use a broad base of voices. More student housing on UMass, so less in town. More money from the colleges coming to town.

To help the town ensure safe affordable housing for residents while maintaining open space

Housing so that people who serve our community [teachers, fire, police, public works, etc.] can afford to live in the town in which they work.

Affordable housing. No more McMini Mansions. More affordable housing

This is an impossible question. Affordable Housing! Safe & secure living and learning opportunities for every citizen! So many more!

Transportation, getting around

More public transportation not necessarily huge buses, maybe wheel chair accessible small vehicles feeding into Rte 9 type large buses. More walking, bicycles

1. Make downtown more pedestrian-centered. 2. Create a smaller-footprint Amherst. 3. To enlarge tax base and to attract more businesses serving local people. 4. Build more Clark-house like apartments downtown or in town-centers.

Wider lanes for bikes & clear bike lanes. More diversity in building zones. Get more businesses downtown. Cinema project go ahead.

More public transportation to outlying areas, 'specially Leverett & Shutesbury. Enforced law. Reduce fast food introduction

Workable [livable] village center plans with better public transportation and less need for cars anywhere

More sidewalks! Everywhere! Lots of bikepaths! Active living by design! Non-polluting busses!

Let's be a model town in this regard. Kendrick Park to be an easy place to hand out as a family.

Make/keep schools highest priority. Mixed income housing developments with great design. [Like in Toronto]

Scarce energy resources

Plan for a future of scarce and expensive oil and electricity. [Consider zoning, transportation, location of public buildings, windmills or other ways to create our own energy, mixed zoning]

Limiting development

#1 Limit development. #2 Create more walking places & public gathering places

Control growth

Provide a structure to manage and limit growth without becoming a wealthy gated community. Growth of our footprint [traffic, building] has to be limited and we need a plan that lets us choose the limits rather than the limits choosing us. [Limits that choose us are rising prices, falling quality of life, and loss of open space, etc.]

Quality of life

Livable, unstressful community

To foster an ambiance that is distinct and attractive [build on institutions, utilize natural advantages].

Regionalization of resources. Municipally owned commercial space for small business – also housing for town employees. To get around Hadley!

To improve education, build more agriculture, and clear up traffic

Other comments/guidance noted on other cards at the forum
[including “p.s.” comments & suggestions on the blue cards]

Process of Master Plan

Suggestion: Organize block parties throughout town for discussion& community building. Example: designate Block Party Weekend.

The intimidation minorities feel in a group of white prevents participation. A second group is immigrants who feel the same way.

Note for Alisa: the Fire Station Study Committee plans to hold a public information session in September. We should coordinate to ensure there's not a conflict. [Kay Moran]

Suggestions for other groups to reach out to: religious institutions, civic and fraternal organizations [Rotary, Knights of Columbus, Masonry & Eastern Star, VFW, etc.]

Engage the public school and kids K-12 in the planning process.

Utilize CATV with Round Table forums/discussions of planning process, needs, and suggestions already received. Could be diverse citizenry, specialty town boards, business, etc.

How do we reach out and involve underserved population? Amherst Family Center. Family Outreach of Amherst. Go to housing complexes [Boulders & Rolling Green] to have meetings. * Transportation is an issue.

Please have several meetings throughout the town, especially at apartment complexes and in various neighborhoods. Send questionnaire out to all household in a mass mailing or via volunteer delivery.

Make the whole process transparent: how exactly is the \$20,000 being spent? Who are we paying, and for what services?

Transportation & circulation

[In answer to the question regarding 3 things that would make my life more successful] Public transportation, supervised youth center, space for bike path through town

The concern for bike trails, transportation should be realistic! There are major problems sharing roads with heavy traffic [i.e. Main Street]. Many cannot ride bikes or be close to buses, even if more can be supported. The area is not flat. The town is long and narrow – BIG PROBLEM for heavy bike use.

We need to reduce the volume and speed of traffic on our streets. No fare mass transit. Car-free town center. Crosswalks & bike lanes better maintained [i.e. painted]. Bike sheds & racks downtown.

Asphalt paths on little park [by Black Sheep] so kids can bike on it. Get an economic development plan [analyze town's strengths, current employment, etc.]. playground on common [with play structure and hoops]. Reduce speeds to 30 – 35 mph & enforce. More sidewalks and bike paths. More ways to ride safely onto bike path. Redevelop existing housing complexes and commercial centers for more density [to up and in and around]. Playground on common.

Other

I would like to see the town Visitors' Center at Kenrick Park. I would not designate land on Pine St. for farm land but keep it flexible for possible school, recreation, playing fields, etc.

Quality of life includes law and order. Less Mafia influence: undocumented alien pizza delivery people. Do “bosses” take out FICA. Far too many bzns [?]. Bad drivers go unpunished. Today I saw a cop with no seatbelt. Another cutt off three pedestrians in the crosswalk by the South Pleasant information kiosk.

Please incorporate Amherst Preservation Plan -- April 2005, Section 6, action plan – into the Comprehensive Plan.

Would like to see a greensward extending from Wildwood Cemetery to field behind preschool on Strong Street to West Cemetery for hiking, open space, animal habitat.